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AUTHOR Templeton, Rosalyn Anstine; Skaggs, Jobie L.; Johnson, Celia E.

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ABSTRACT

Influenced by Carnegie Academy Campus Program conversations, faculty (n=71) advising responsibilities and attitudes were explored at a midsize, comprehensive, private university. As part of an effort to improve student learning, the primarily quantitative Student Advising Survey was used to establish advising patterns. The survey found that faculty spent an average of 36.71 hours each semester advising an average of 29.14 students. A significant number of students do not seek out advising from their assigned advisers, and the majority of respondents advised students not assigned to them. Faculty indicated advising primarily involved advising about courses, followed by career advising. Computer access to student registration records was the most helpful service, and referral to the career center was the resource used most frequently. Respondents rated their advising effectiveness as high, although slightly less than half of the faculty (42.7%) received training in advising and 46.7% thought that training would be beneficial. The limitations and importance of this research and future studies are discussed. (Contains 3 tables and 28 references.) (SLD)

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Examining Faculty's Perceptions of Student Advising to Improve Learning Environments

Rosalyn Anstine Templeton

Jobie L. Skaggs

Celia E. Johnson

Bradley University

1501 West Bradley

Peoria, Illinois

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R. Templeton
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Voice: (309)-677-3693

Fax: 309-677-677-2952

Email: rat@Bradley.edu

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Abstract

Influenced by Carnegie Academy Campus Program conversations, faculty ($N = 71$) advisement responsibilities and attitudes were explored at a midsize, comprehensive, and private university. As part of an effort to improve student learning, the primarily quantitative Student Advising Survey was used to establish advising patterns. Results found faculty spent an average of 36.71 hours each semester advising an average of 29.14 students. A significant number of students do not seek out advisement from their assigned advisers. Further, the majority of respondents advised students not assigned to them. Faculty indicated advising primarily involved course advisement followed by career advisement; computer access to student registration records was the most helpful service, and referrals to the career center was the most frequently utilized resource. Respondents rated their advising effectiveness as high, slightly less than half of faculty (42.7 %) received advisement training, while 46.7% thought training would be beneficial. Importance, limitations, and future research of this important topic are discussed.

KEY WORDS: advising, learning environments, faculty evaluation, faculty perceptions

1. Purpose

Research on positive outcomes of college and on the diverse needs of students making-up today's student population suggests that a new look at advising is needed (Frost, 1991a; Pavel, 1992). Researchers conducting this study set out to investigate faculty perceptions of their own student advising. Effective student advising contributes to improved student retention (Moses, 2001), positive learning environments, and motivation to complete programs on time (Frost, 1991b; Mastrodicasa, 2001). Influenced by Carnegie Academy Campus Program Conversations (see website), students, faculty and administration at Bradley University joined to advance the "scholarship of teaching" through examining attitudes concerning faculty responsibilities as advisers.

2. Perspectives

The American College Testing Program defines advising as follows:

> Academic advising is a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary (1984).

According to Light (2001), "Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 15). Advising experts (Frost, 1991b; Light; Mastrodicasa, 2001) assert that advising has immediate and long-term benefits for individual students. Motivating learners to remain in academic programs during difficult times, providing meaningful (out-of-class) contact with faculty, and encouraging involvement in university experiences are a few rewards of effective faculty advising.

Conversely, poor advising leads to student anxiety and frustration (Astin & Astin, 2000; Astin, 1984). Additionally, students who lack meaningful advising feel alienated, lonely, discouraged, and overwhelmed (Flores, 1994). Therefore, researchers in this study selected to focus on improving students' college experience by attending to one aspect of learning, namely, advising.

Saving (1994) notes that the majority of academic advising is done by faculty members. Due to differences among colleges' delivery of student advisement (Astin & Astin, 2000), the initial step required is to capture faculty members' attitudes and descriptions of advising. How do faculty members view their roles as advisors? In a study on advising conducted by Crockett & Levitz (1984), surveys were mailed to 1,095 institutions of higher education, with a 69% response rate or 601 surveys returned. Results indicated that faculty members were not recognized or rewarded for their service to students. Also, 75% of the institutions surveyed did not include advising functions when evaluating faculty members for promotion or tenure. Additionally, faculty members reported that they had received no training to perform advising responsibilities.

Highlighting and extending these findings, Habley & Crockett (1988) surveyed 652 post secondary institutions with 447 institutions responding. Again results suggested that, faculty members were not recognized or rewarded for the required duty. The advising functions were not evaluated or

examined in regards to promotion and training for advisors was lacking. Furthermore, respondents said faculty members had no input in the evaluation or creation of advising programs.

Creamer & Creamer (1994) and Middleton (1988) reported similar findings as noted above. Areas of interest to faculty advisors were recognition and reward, use of advising in the faculty evaluation process, mandated advising, and not having to advise on personal problems of students.

Those involved in the current study viewed the collection of faculty's perception of their own advising as just one "incremental step" toward building a collective faculty understanding of the importance of student advising (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 9).

3. Method

The current study was conducted as primarily a quantitative research project, with open-ended questions used to clarify and add insight to the quantitative results. Combined methodologies, in the study of learning environments, have been advocated by Tobin and Fraser (1998) and others (Anstine Templeton & Jensen, 1993; Johnson & Anstine Templeton, 1999).

3.1 *Quantitative*

Researchers used a survey research design (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999) to assess faculty perceptions of their student advising. Based on the results of Bradley's Carnegie Campus Conversations (CCC), a preliminary survey was developed to assess faculty's description of and attitudes toward student advising. Survey construction was based on CCC trends, review of the literature, and two pilot studies. The final instrument was named the Student Advising Survey (SAS).

SAS item construction included continuous, Likert fixed-choice, and open-ended questions. Continuous items provide a reliable measure of frequency; Likert items provide a measure of attitude or belief; fixed-choice items narrow respondent choices; (Heppner et. al 1999); and open-ended items are beneficial when responses cannot be anticipated or concepts are too complex for specification in closed questions (Bachman & Schutt, 2001

The SAS is a paper-and-pencil, nineteen item descriptive survey. Areas assessed included a) college affiliation and years of service, b) current advising load and tasks, c) self-perceived effectiveness, and d) advisement training. Specific item structure included the following: 1) eight continuous items (e.g., how many students do you academically advise), 2) one ten-point Likert item (e.g, rate advising effectiveness), 3) six fixed choice items (e.g., college affiliation), and 4) four open ended questions (e.g., what does student advising mean to you). A summary of the SAS items can be found in Table I (see Appendix A).

The fifteen quantitative items were analyzed with SPSS (SPSS, 1995). Descriptive statistics (frequencies and measures of central tendency) were computed. Mean differences, when appropriate, were also determined. Results were summarized and then consider within the context of qualitative open-ended responses.

3.2 *Qualitative Methods*

To enhance the results of the Student Advising Survey, researchers incorporated a qualitative methodology that drew upon the interpretive methods and knowledge of Erickson (1986, 1998) and Shagoury Hubbard and Miller Power (1993). Interpretive methods are known for their ability to render visible subtle aspects (feelings, values, beliefs, and experiences) of learning environments. More specific to this study, qualitative evidence was necessary in assessing faculty's attitudes toward student advising (Pavel, 1992). Additionally, when focusing on institutional change (Eckel, Green, & Hill, 2001), a qualitative methodology provides a good "fit" to the research topic.

Faculty members responded to four open-ended questions. Questions were designed to assess faculty's perceptions of student advising, effectiveness of their own advising, how advising affects students' learning, and what would enhance the advising process. Information gathered was analyzed and analysis used to find common patterns and themes from participants' responses. As with any qualitative method, the researchers in the current study used a self-reflexive stance and acknowledge, up front, their biases, beliefs and life experiences may have had an impact on the research process (Franklin, 1996). To embrace reactivity (Creswell, 1998), while collecting and interpreting interview information,

researchers avoided what Smith (1991) noted as the tendency to make judgments based on assumptions grounded in ones own culture.

3.3 Data Source

Bradley University is an independent, privately endowed institution. Founded by Lydia Moss Bradley in 1897 and located on a 75-acre campus in Peoria, Illinois, Bradley has an enrollment of 5,000 undergraduate and 1,000 graduate students. As noted in the most recent catalog, "Bradley's faculty are both active researchers and committed teachers who provide personalized attention in learning and academic advising" (Undergraduate Catalog, 2002-2003, p. 5).

The Student Advising Survey was distributed, via university mail, to 301 faculty members. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a reminder e-mail was sent to all faculty. Faculty who had misplaced their surveys were provided with a replacement. Four weeks after the initial mailing a total of seventy-one (N = 71) responded.

4. Results

Of the 301 faculty members who received the SAS, 24% (N = 71) responded and were retained for analyses. Affiliation response by college was, Business 13.3% (N = 10), Fine Arts 6.7 % (N = 5), Engineering 13.3 % (N = 10), Education and Health Sciences 29.3 % (N = 22), Liberal Arts 24 % (N = 32) and reporting no college affiliation 5.3% (N = 4). Respondents had an overall average of 12.65 years of service (M = 12.65, SD = 9.64). Faculty reported spending 36.71 (M = 36.71, SD = 32.28) hours each semester advising. The average number of students advised was 29.14 (M = 29.14, SD = 24.08). Twenty-five percent (25.25%) were graduate students and 71.14% were undergraduate students. Faculty reported that 73.3 % (N = 55) advised students not assigned to them. Table II describes general respondent advising descriptives.

Researchers were interested to know how many students actually sought advisement from their assigned advisor. Results were varied with 25.25 (M = 25.25, SD = 40.84) undergraduates and 71.13 (M = 71.13, SD = 42.40) graduate students actively seeking advisement. A t-test was applied to determine if

students seeking advisement from assigned advisors significantly differed from those not contacting assigned advisers. Results indicated that students tended to significantly, $t = (66)$ -4.447, $p < .000$, not actively seek advisement from their assigned advisors.

One closed choice question asked respondents to identify what advising included. Results found course advisement was most frequently selected (60.52%, $SD = 28.89$) followed by career advisement (17.88 %, $SD = 15.97$), thesis advisement (12.13 %, $SD = 23.22$), and other (8.24 %, $SD = 11.25$). A similar open-ended question enhanced the meaning of the quantitative findings. The final surfacing theme revealed advising included personal advising or setting life goals, getting through bureaucracy, mentoring, and problem solving.

In terms of advising effectiveness, respondents rated themselves quite high ($M = 8.69$, $SD = 1.14$) on a scale from one (low) to ten (high). An open ended question asked faculty to explain their self-rating. Of those who believed they were doing a good job of student advising most often listed the following as proof for effectiveness: (a) positive feedback from students and peers, (b) high knowledge level of the advising process and programs, and (c) students graduating on time. For faculty who viewed their effectiveness in a negative light listed the following reasons as proof: (a) still learning, (b) not enough time, and (c) students fail to follow advice. A related second open-ended question revealed that respondents believed the following would improve their advising effectiveness: (a) more time, (b) fewer advisees, and (c) training or refresher training.

The final open-ended question asked how faculty perceived their advising affects student learning. The majority of the respondents said their advising had a positive influence on student learning. Statements listed most often were: (a) a very positive effect, (b) helps students with planning, (c) helps students by calming, encouraging, motivating, building confidence, and solving problems. Five respondents felt that student advising did not influence student learning and one faculty did not know if advising impacted learning.

Advisement training and desire for future training was examined. More than one third (42.7 %, $N = 32$) reported that they had not received advisement training. Nearly the same number (42.50%, $N = 31$) stated that training would not be beneficial, and 10.7% ($N = 8$) did not respond to this item.

Services considered most helpful and used most often were identified (see Table III for a description of services). Faculty reported that Academic Inquire (70.6%) as the most helpful service followed by the University Catalog (64.7%) and the Academic Handbook (61.8%). The Student Handbook (20.6%), Academic Handbook (14.7%), and other (17.6 %) appeared to be the least helpful. Services most frequently recommended included the Career Center (63.2%), Learning Assistance Program (57.4%), and the Center for Wellness & Counseling (52.9%). Services utilized less frequently were the Center for Orientation, Testing and Advisement (29.4%). Services infrequently used were the academic ombudsman (8.8%), other (8.8%), Advisement Hotlines (4.5%), and off campus services (4.5%).

5. Discussion

The first notable aspect of this study was the poor response rate of 24%. Reasons for this could be due to sampling methods. However, other possibilities will be discussed in the context of other findings in this study. These researchers were pleased with the college wide representation and average length and variability of years of service.

Faculty advise an average of 29 assigned students who are primarily undergraduate (75%). These findings are consistent with expectations, considering that 83% of the sampled university student body is comprised of undergraduate students. Advisement of unassigned students beyond the average was common among 73% of respondents. A significant finding revealed that students tended to not seek regular advisement from their assigned adviser. However, this finding must be considered in light of the previous pattern of advising unassigned students. Meaning, readers are encouraged to not assume that students are not being advised, but rather, students may seek advisement from unassigned faculty due to others reasons (e.g., such as accessibility and convenience) (Light, 2001). Finally, these researchers wonder if the tradition of assigning advisors to students should be re-examined and include faculty input (Habley & Crockett, 1988).

On average, faculty dedicated close to 37 hours, each semester, to advising. In other words, advising nearly consumes just short of two full 40-hour weeks each academic year. When one considers the typical teaching, research, and service needed to gain tenure and promotion (Creamer & Creamer, 1994; Crockett & Levitz, 1984; Habbey & Crocket, 1988; Middleton, 1988) coupled with institutions of

higher education's' interest in student retention (Moses, 2001) a conflict of interest seems natural and is apparent.

By far, faculty perceived assisting students with course selection as the primary task of advisement. An opened-ended questioned enhanced the understanding of what course selection might represent: course, class, program, and academic advising. Respondents indicated that only 17% of advisement time was dedicated to career discussions. Yet on an open-ended question, over half (51%) believed career advising represented advising. Further, 41% suggested advisement as something more "person-centered" (e.g., mentoring, problem solving help).

Respondents ranked their overall advisement effectiveness as high. Evidence of their self-assessment was based on student and peer feedback, awareness of programs and process, and timely student graduation. While still high, a small number of respondents indicated they were still learning, desired fewer advisees, or student failure to follow advice.

The most disconcerting result revealed that less than half of respondents had received training that was similar findings by Crockett & Levitz (1984). This current study went further with a question asking if training would be helpful. Nearly half (42.50%)of the faculty stated training would not be beneficial. A number of explanations exist for this response. The most obvious possibility centers on asking faculty to commit even more time to an already unrecognized activity. Also, it is possible that respondents perceived their "on the job training" as sufficient.

Habley & Crockett (1988) found faculty desired greater input into advisement services and referral sources. With that in mind, these researchers attempted to identify services most often used. On demand computer access to current student records was overwhelmingly the most preferred service. Next, official handbooks were preferred. Existing referral resources found the career center the most utilized. Services rarely used included the academic ombudsmen, advisement hotlines, and outside services. These authors viewed these finding as positive. When one considers that the aforementioned are in place for problems, emergencies, and service gaps.

6. Importance

A review of the literature indicates there is a definite link between effective advising and student success (Frost, 1991b; Mastrodicasa, 2001; Moses, 2001). Therefore, it is important that research on effective advising and student success continues (Frost, 1991a; Pavel, 1992). This study reflects Bradley University's intentional effort to explore student advising, in an attempt to improve student learning, and to help overburdened faculty become more efficient and effective in the advisement process. A number of important areas worth consideration have been identified based on the findings of this study.

Nearly half of the respondents had not received advisement training and did not believe future training would be beneficial. With this in mind an interesting culmination of factors seem to be in place. First, advisement responsibilities are not part of faculty evaluation. Second, advisement tasks consume nearly two full weeks of a typical academic year. Therefore it very well may be that a minority of faculty are carrying the advisement load for faculty who have little concrete incentive to actively make themselves conveniently available for their assigned students.

Findings were unclear regarding how respondents attached meaning to advisement. Quantitative findings found course advisement was the primary advising task. However, the related open-ended question revealed a more person - centered view of advisement. This finding offers an opportunity for a dialogue among university administration, faculty, and students to better tailor advisement to ultimately improve student learning.

Habley & Crockett (1988) found, among other conclusions, that faculty had no input into the creation of advising programs. In this current study, respondents made no specific statements regarding the need to create additional advising programs. This finding is viewed as positive. However, faculty did make comments regarding needed changes within the existing advisement tradition. Primarily, advising fewer students and having more time for advisement seemed to be the most common preference. The aforementioned preferences bring these findings full circle. The expectation that faculty advise students yet offering no external incentive to do so. It is worth noting that not a single response on open-ended questions asked that advising become part of the evaluation process. Consequently it may be possible

that faculty are either unaware or do not care that advising is not part of evaluation. If the later is true then motivation to advise may be based purely on intrinsic motives.

7. Limitations

The most notable limitation of this study was the poor response rate. Careful consideration regarding future research should correct for this problem. Further, generalizability to the entire state of advisement at Bradley University cannot be assumed due to lake of randomization. Finally, this study was intentionally intended to be descriptive in nature and one incremental step toward understanding faculty perceptions of student advising to improve learning environments. Consequently, no causal relationships can be assumed. However, this study will provide valuable information as the next incremental step toward improving learning environments is taken.

8. Future Research

This area of study is ripe for future research. Possibilities might include: a) determining if the average faculty member understands advisement responsibilities within the context of evaluation, b) the tradition of assigning advisees to advisers, c) at what point does the advisor refer students to available services and if the point of referral needs to be adjusted to better serve students, d) a holistic study into the advisor-advisee relationship, e) a holistic study into university administration's perceptions and expectations of advisement, f) conduct similar studies as those described above but sample students.

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Appendix A

Table I

Student Advising Survey Items

Continuous	Item
	How many years have you worked at Bradley?
	How many students do you academically advise?
	What percentage of advisees are graduate students?
	What percentage of advisees are undergraduate students?
	Do you advise students other than those assigned to you?
	Of the students assigned to you, how many per semester actively seek advisement?
	Estimate how many hours per semester you devote to advising.

Likert	Item
	In you student advising, how do you perceive your effectiveness? Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High

Fixed-Choice	Item
	What university services are most helpful to you as an adviser (Academic Inquire, Academic Handbook, Student Handbook, University Catalog, Undergraduate Academic Advising Handbook, Other)?
	During advising, what BU or other services do you recommend to students (Learning Assistance Program, Center for Orientation, Testing, and Advisement, Center for Wellness & Counseling, Smith Career Center, Academic Ombudsman, Academic Review Board, Advisement Hotlines, Off campus services, Other)?
	What is your college affiliation?
	What percent of the following does your student advising include (course, career, thesis, other)?

Dichotomous	Item
	Do you receive any training for advising?
	Would training be beneficial?

Open Ended	Item
	What does student advising mean to you?
	Explain how you rated your perceived advising effectiveness.
	As an adviser, what would enhance your effectiveness?
	How do you perceive your advising affects your students' learning?

Note. Actual order of items on Student Advising Survey differs from order listed here

Appendix B

Table II

General Respondent Advising Descriptives: By College and Overall

College Affiliation	N	Years of Service		Hours Advising[a]		Students Advised[b]	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Business	10	14.88	5.22	46.63	30.19	38.50	15.10
Fine Arts	5	12.25	10.50	56.50	41.90	56.25	21.75
Engineering	10	11.67	9.90	45.70	35.38	29.10	32.43
Education & Health Sciences	22	9.05	8.00	39.30	37.22	32.55	25.55
Liberal Arts	24	15.91	11.40	23.07	20.71	17.63	16.30
Overall	71	12.65	9.64	36.71	32.28	29.14	24.08

Note. a = each semester; b = assigned students.

Appendix C

Table III

Advising Resources and Services

Resource	**Definition**
Student Handbook	Includes official dates, directory; student activities, organizations, services, government, and standards of conduct
University Catalog (Graduate & Undergraduate)	Academic program description, policies, and regulations
Center for Academic Transition Programs & Assessment Services	Assessments for business/industry/schools; student testing for academic major/career selection; veteran testing; and academic probation advisement
Center for Learning Assistance	Learning enhancement services (peer tutoring, study skills, contract study time, student athlete academic services)
Center for Orientation	Assists new students' and their parents' adjustment to the university life.
Center for Wellness	Counselors and support staff work with students in their total growth and development.
Career Center	Career professionals help students define career goals, meet prospective employers, obtain career-related work experience, and job searches
Academic Review Board	Provides information that supports planning and decision making regarding resource allocations and programmatic
Advisement Hotline	A telephone service that provides students with answers to registration and advising questions or referral sources
Ombudsman	A faculty intermediary between students and faculty members